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CHAPTER III.

OF THE PERSONS OF THE ABIPONES, AND THE CONFORMATION OF THEIR BODIES.

142 THE Abipones are well formed, and have handsome faces, much like those of Europeans, except in point of colour, which, though not entirely white, has nothing of the blackness of Negroes and Mulattoes. For that natural whiteness which they have in infancy is somewhat destroyed as they grow up, by the sun, and by the smoke: as nearly the whole of their lives is passed in riding about plains exposed to the beams of the sun, and the short time that they spend in their tents, they keep up a fire on the ground day and night, by the heat and smoke of which they are unavoidably somewhat darkened. Whenever the cold south wind blows, [513] they move the fire to the bed, or place it underneath the hanging net in which they lie, and are thus gradually smoke-dried, like a gammon of bacon in a chimney. The women, when they 142 293 832 ride out into the country, shield their faces from the sun's rays with an umbrella, and are, in consequence, generally fairer than the men, who, more ambitious to be dreaded by their

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dered that such children should be as imbecile in mind as in body.

Their education also conduces greatly to form the manners and strengthen the bodies of the Abipones. For, as Quintilian observes, in his first book of Institutes, that soft kind of breeding, which we call indulgence, relaxes all the nerves both of the mind and body. No one can object to the education of the Abipones on account of its delicacy. The children are plunged into a cold stream, if there be one at a convenient distance, as soon as they see the light. They know of no such things as cradles, feathers, cushions, swathing-clothes, blandishments, and toys. Covered with a light garment of otters' skins, they sleep wherever chance directs, and crawl upon the ground like little pigs. Whenever a mother has to take a journey on horseback, she places the child in a bag made of boars' skins, and suspended from the saddle along with the puppies, pots, gourds, &c. The husband will often come and snatch his little son, as he is sucking, from its mother's arms, set him on his own horse, and behold him riding with eyes sparkling with pleasure. When a mother is swimming in a river for the sake of a bath, she presses her infant to her breast with one hand, while she uses the other as an oar. If the child be pretty big, it is thrown into the

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147 484 726 of dust, and hurricanes of wind. They generally cover their bodies with woollen garments, which fit close to the skin; but if the extreme heat obliges them to throw these off as far as the middle, their breasts, shoulders, and arms are cruelly bitten and covered with blood by swarms of flies, gad-flies, gnats, and wasps. [324] As they always set out upon their journeys unfurnished with provisions, they are obliged to be constantly on the look out for wild animals, which they may pursue, kill, and convert [415] into a remedy for their hunger. As they have no cups they pass the night by the side of rivers or lakes, out of which they drink like dogs. But this opportunity of getting water is dearly purchased; for moist places are not only seminaries of gnats and serpents, but likewise the haunts of dangerous wild beasts, which threaten them with sleepless nights and [513] peril of their lives. They sleep upon the hard ground, either starved with cold, or parched with heat, and if overtaken by a storm, often lie awake, soaking in water the whole night. When they perform the office of scouts, they frequently have to creep on their hands and feet over trackless woods, and through forests, to avoid discovery; passing days and nights without sleep or food. This also was the case when they were long pursued by the enemy, and forced to hasten their flight.

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462 765 assemble in a hut, one of the female jugglers presiding over the party, and regulating the chaunting and other rites. It is her business to strike two large drums alternately, and to sing the doleful funeral song, the rest observing the same measure of voice. This infernal elegy, accompanied with the rattling of gourds and bellowing of drums, lasts till morning. The same method is observed for eight days without variation; on the ninth night, if they be mourning for a woman, the pans are broken, not without proper ceremonies. The tragic howl, which they uttered on the preceding nights, now gives place to a more festive chaunt, which the old female drummeress interrupts at intervals with out-stretched jaws and a deep, and, as it were, threatening voice, seemingly to exhort her singing companions to hilarity and louder notes. These nocturnal lamentations, which continue nine days, are commenced at the setting and concluded at the rising of the sun. The patience displayed by the women in enduring so many sleepless nights is truly astonishing, but still more so is that of the men who can sleep soundly whilst the air is filled with confused shouts, and the noise of gourds and drums. Nor are funeral rites alone conducted in this manner. The sacred anniversaries to

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pools and rivers; to take a survey of the spot; to examine the tall grass, decayed trunks, and recesses of shrubs and rocks, before they sat or lay down. The Indians who neglect these precautions, are constantly liable to the bites of serpents. Throwing themselves carelessly on the ground, they sleep soundly without a fear or a thought about serpents, and are often awakened with a scream by the bite of one. When travelling bare-footed they employ their eyes in watching birds in the air and monkeys in the trees, when they ought, at every step, to examine the dangerous ground they are treading. The Abipones, from being an equestrian people, and more circumspect, seldomer suffer from serpents than the Guaranies, who always walk on foot, and use less caution. In the town of St. Joachim, where the climate is very hot, and the land is surrounded with marshes, rivers, and woods, venomous animals are unusually numerous. Scarce a week passes that some Indians are not bitten by serpents. During the eight years that I spent in this town a vast number of persons were bitten by various serpents, but, with the exception of two youths who were killed by a rattle-snake, not a single individual died: all were healed by the use of one and the same remedy. Now listen attentively whilst I make you acquainted with that